

CHAPTER 380
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY ASSISTANCE
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381 GENERAL

Under certain defined conditions, the Federal Government, acting through the Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) may provide assistance to states for some state-responsibility fires. Montana has successfully applied for and received such assistance in recent years and may do so again, if conditions so warrant.

A. CRITERIA FOR ASSISTANCE

FEMA assistance may be provided ". . .when such help is deemed necessary to suppress any fire on publicly or privately owned forest or grassland which threatens such destruction as would constitute a major disaster." The key phrase here is "*major disaster*." *Most DNRC fires are not major disasters.*

See Appendix E in this manual for Declaration Process and Criteria.

FEMA provides some criteria to be considered in evaluating whether a fire is a major disaster. This criteria is:

- IMMINENT threat to lives and improved property
- Availability of State and local resources
- High fire danger conditions (National indices)
- Potential MAJOR economic impact

(See "Fire Management Assistance Grant Program (FMAG) Declaration Process, Application Process and the program outline for eligibility of applicants and costs.)

In addition to these criteria for determining a major fire disaster, states must also satisfy certain FEMA financial criteria, which basically verify that the state is spending at least its normal amount of money for fire suppression. This is called the "threshold." In Montana, there is either an individual fire cost threshold of \$100,000 per declared fire or a cumulative fire cost threshold when total costs for all declared and non-declared forest or grassland fires in the calendar year meet or exceed \$500,000.

B. DNRC STANDARDS

When such conditions exist, and Montana successfully applies for and receives FEMA assistance, DNRC responsibility fire suppression operations will continue to be managed to existing DNRC standards. In other words, no extraordinary practices will be exercised just because of FEMA Fire Management Assistance. Regular DNRC standards of safety, economy, cooperation, supervision, etc. and regular DNRC procedures will continue to apply with or without FEMA assistance.

C. INCIDENT PERIOD

When FEMA approves a State application for assistance, normally very early in the fire suppression operation for an individual major fire disaster, a period known as an "incident period" begins. The incident period would normally end when the fire is controlled and the threat of a major disaster no longer exists.

382 MONTANA/FEMA COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT

FEMA Fire Suppression Assistance to Montana is provided through an existing cooperative agreement (see Chapter 350 this manual). This agreement specifies legal authorities, considerable detailed procedures, requirements, etc. A copy of the current Montana State/FEMA Agreement is on file at the Fire and Aviation Management Bureau, Forestry Division, Missoula.

Among the provisions of this agreement is the designation, by name, of those Montana officials who are authorized as the Governor's Authorized Representative (GAR) or Alternate GARs to place requests for assistance to FEMA. These are presently listed as:

- Mary Sexton, Director, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (GAR)
- Robert A. Harrington, Administrator, Forestry Division, Missoula (AGAR)
- Ted Mead, Chief, Fire and Aviation Management Bureau, Missoula (AGAR)
- John Monzie, Fire Suppression Section Supervisor, Fire and Aviation Management Bureau, Missoula (AGAR)
- Sandra O'Bryant, State Fire Fiscal Officer, Fire and Aviation Management Bureau, Missoula (AGAR)
- Garry Williams, Area Manager, Central Land Office, Helena (AGAR)

383 FEMA HANDBOOK

For the many additional required detailed procedures, FEMA provides for state use a handbook entitled "Federal Disaster Assistance Program - Fire Suppression Assistance Handbook, Pursuant To Public Law 93-288", DR & R-4, 1991. A copy of this handbook is on file at the Fire and Aviation Management Bureau, Forestry Division, Missoula

NOTE: *The FEMA rules changed as of November 1, 2001 and the handbook on file is currently outdated. At present, FEMA is rewriting the handbook and its estimated time of completion has been postponed from October 2003. A new estimated date of completion has not been released.*

384 REQUIRED INFORMATION

Among the requirements for obtaining FEMA assistance for a major fire disaster, DNRC must prepare and submit to FEMA a Request For Federal Aid. The majority of this information must originate at the fire scene and be reported through the responsible Land Office to the Fire and Aviation Management Bureau, Forestry Division, who will prepare the request for the approval and signature of a designated Montana Governor's Authorized Representative.

(See information the Land Office is responsible for supplying on the "Decision Checklist" form [See Appendix E of this manual.])